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**‘7 Million Londoners, 1 London’: National and Urban Ideas of Community in the Aftermath of the 7<sup>th</sup> July Bombings in London**  
**Angharad Closs Stevens**

The political responses to the bombings in London on the 7 July 2005, the subsequent ‘failed’ bombings on 21 July, and the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes by anti-terrorist officers on 22 July, show us that the idea of a community in unity continues to be the overwhelmingly dominant model we have available for how we might organise political communities. This is the idea that a community must be formed around the foundational principle of unity, representing a shared essence that goes beyond people’s membership in a society or state.<sup>1</sup> It is the image of community that underpins nationalist discourses, the kind that were circulating at full speed in the aftermath of the London bombings. This chapter will explore the idea of a community in unity through the case of political responses to the London bombings. In doing so, it will seek to reveal the tremendous capacity of this idea in steering out ability to conceive of possible alternatives. It will also offer a contribution to studies in international political theory that are specifically interested in exploring what might be involved in the task of forming different ideas of community, and what might be done to avoid reproducing the familiar impasses.

The British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s immediate response, delivered within three hours of the bombings in London, was a characteristic affirmation of a British community in unity. He stated that these events must be understood as attacks on the ‘British way of life’ (Blair 2005). This narrative worked very successfully in creating a binary logic between the ‘British people’ and ‘those people [that are trying] to cow us, to frighten us out of doing the things we want to do’ (Blair 2005). People were asked to choose: either they were with the British people, and the British government representing ‘our way of life’, or they were with the people who acted through terrorism. This consolidation of British identity worked well insofar as it silenced any seriously threatening criticism of the British government in the aftermath of the bombings. Unlike in Madrid, where the bombings on the 11 March 2004 led to sharp political divisions, and a change in government following the general election three days later, nothing as remotely subversive or disturbing happened to the social order in London and the UK: calm was quickly restored, leaders of government and the police remained in their positions, and Prime Minister Blair maintained his authority.

An alternative idea of community circulated alongside this declaration of British unity in the aftermath of the London bombings however: this was the idea of London as an urban, multicultural community, organized around the principle of difference rather than unity. This

message was most powerfully supported and disseminated by the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone. And it was summed up in many high-profile and well-sponsored advertising campaigns that the Mayor's Office and Transport for London ran in the aftermath of the bombings.<sup>2</sup> These included posters and banners displayed across the London Underground, at bus stops, train stations and along various streets, declaring the slogan, '7 Million Londoners, One London', and then later, 'We are Londoners, We are One'. This response, led by the Mayor of London, sought to celebrate the plurality and diversity of the city, in contrast to British identity and unity. This cosmopolitan ethos was largely seen as a preferable substitute for those who felt critical of Prime Minister Blair and his government's role in the war in Iraq especially.<sup>3</sup> Yet, it is significant that the multicultural message promoted by these poster campaigns is also firmly underpinned by an insistence on unity: We are Londoners, but we are also One. This raises some questions: to what extent did the idea of London as a multicultural community represent a notably alternative understanding of community to the nationalist narrative? Did the multicultural narrative provide an opportunity to disturb or disrupt the binary between Britishness and Terrorism? Or, did the idea of a multicultural community work more in tandem with narratives of British identity, providing a more progressive undertone to them? In this chapter, I explore two different ideas of community that circulated in the aftermath of the London bombings and ask what effect these had on opening up or closing down our ability to ask critical questions about these events. This discussion will raise broader questions for political and international relations theory, insofar as it will address the possibility of imagining community without reproducing oppression.

I begin by focusing on the dominant idiom we have for understanding community, as principally based around unity. This is the idea that a community is formed around some sense of commonality, and that members of the community draw their identity from a *thing* that they share in common.<sup>4</sup> This *thing* can be language, culture, traditions, customs or habits; it can also, in its most pernicious forms, become 'race', superiority, biology, or an elusive 'way of life'. I examine the different ideas of community deployed in the aftermath of the bombings by looking at the way in which they lay claim to a different understanding of origins. I ask, what are the foundational claims that underpin these ideas of community? How does the focus on a common culture or on multiculturalism work to different effects? In this comparison, I don't assume that the multicultural narrative is necessarily a preferable alternative to a nationalist narrative. Although the former may seem to have to come to supplant the latter, as a more 'enlightened' version of it, it is worth remembering that both developed more or less together in the history of ideas.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, neither is in essence a progressive or a reactionary narrative: both can work to either effect in different historical, political and economic contexts. Both can therefore be oppressive. Furthermore, nationalist

and cosmopolitanist narratives can work in alliance and in opposition (Cheah 1998: 22). Consequently, we need to trace the way in which they are invoked in different, shifting contexts, to various political effects.

This focus on the question of origins will inevitably lead to a discussion of how different ideas of community are also framed through particular understandings of space and time. For example, the idea of a community in unity, such as that which we find under nationalism, is formed according to a very particular, linear trajectory of time. The assumption is that we were once united in the past, and that we must work to restore this sense of unity in the future. This principle of unity forms what Zygmunt Bauman has called the *foci imaginarii* of a modern idea of community (Bauman 1991). As such, it sets us off in pursuit of an impossible task. The *foci imaginarii* represents the idea of harmonious unity and order, which forms both the point of origin of the community, and the point of perfection that we hope to reach. Acting as both origin and limit, it propels the forward march of time. It is significant that Bauman calls it an 'impossible' task, because this sense of perfect stability, through unity, is of course a fantasy. But this fantasy has formed part of a relatively consistent and prevailing response to the experience of life under modern conditions. In a world that seems radically open to change, flux, fortune and chance, figures from Rousseau to Marx to Weber to Wagner have pined for a time when everything can once again be solid and secure (Nancy **date?: 10 n1**). In line with Bauman's description of this nostalgic yearning as a fantasy, Jean-Luc Nancy has argued that it is important to understand that the community in unity has not 'lost' anything: it is simply constituted through the idea of loss. There wasn't a time of green pastures or a common language but the *idea* of this 'loss' is fundamental and foundational to the idea of a community in unity (Nancy **date --13**).

While it is fairly straightforward to appreciate that the idea of a community in unity informs nationalist ideas of British identity, I want to suggest that the idea of a community in unity might also be deployed in the city. Narratives of unity are frequently circulated to support the state, but this language can be borrowed by sub-state governmental organisations, as well as by movements that might be trying to resist the state. Thus, I will address two points. Firstly, I want to show how what might appear as an alternative idea of community, one that celebrates difference rather than unity, might nevertheless work to reproduce nationalist principles. The insistence upon unity is never innocent, and it is rarely innocuous. More specifically, I will argue that Mayor Livingstone's celebration of urban multiculturalism provides a compelling variation on the theme of a community in unity, but doesn't necessarily offer us much of an alternative to it. Secondly, I want to argue that we might nevertheless find in the city, and in urban writings, some material for developing a critique of the idea of a community in unity.

In exploring how urban *and* national narratives can work to affirm the logic of a community in unity, I will suggest that the city might nevertheless provide us with an interesting motif for imagining different forms of community, that don't rely upon unity.

### **London as a British Community**

One of the key ideas through which this myth of a 'resilient' British community was constructed in the aftermath of the bombings was through the historical narrative of the Blitz (Manthorpe 2006: 21--2). The story of the Blitz was consistently told across almost all the British national newspapers, together with the bombing campaign of the Provisional IRA, as proof of the enduring 'calm and courage' of Londoners (Manthorpe 2006: 21—2). *The Guardian* newspaper's Leader on the 8 July 2005, the day following the London bombings, opened by quoting from George Orwell writing at the time of the Blitz: 'As I write, highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me' (*The Guardian* 8 July 2005). This is a line that seems somewhat hyperbolic when we consider that at this point, the violence was largely understood as a particular event, and not part of a continuous process. Some of the tabloid newspapers are more excited in their comparisons: 'Adolf Hitler's Blitz and his doodlebug rockets never once broke London's spirit' and 'We survived the Blitz. We lived through 30 years of IRA outrages ... Once again the British people will triumph over evil' being prime examples (*The Guardian* 8 July 2005).<sup>6</sup> But this narrative is not the prerogative of the tabloids: it is recounted by Prime Minister Blair and Sir Ian Blair, head of the Metropolitan Police Commission, and it is further deployed across the British newspapers on the first anniversary of the bombings (Manthorpe 2006: n 12; Freedland 2006). It is well established that national narratives produce a story of origins that can account for the idea that we are a common community, travelling together through history. By invoking the Blitz as a story of origins, the history of London is recounted as the history of Britain. By tying the people living in London today into a direct relationship with those who lived in London at the time of the Second World War, this linear national narrative produces a certain idea of British culture. Given the constant movement of people in and out of cities, it is at best difficult to draw such direct histories of straightforward descendants in the city. But the Blitz invokes a distinctly national history of London as Britain.

Paul Gilroy has rightly pointed to the astonishing endurance of the Blitz narrative in providing an image of British culture at its alleged best. It is still widely circulated, together with the narratives of the war against Hitler and the battle of Britain, as the model of commonality to which people should aspire (Gilroy 2004: 95--8). Of course, the Blitz paradigm also provides a good reminder that history is written by the victors. It's the dominant that stipulate a point of origin from which we are deemed to have emerged as a

community. In this context, Gilroy is right to say that the Blitz narrative must be seen in part for its role in mourning a certain whiteness, and a 'long-vanished homogeneity' (Gilroy 2004: 95). Although London at the time of the Blitz was a cosmopolitan city, this is not the image conjured by the Blitz narrative. Rather, it evokes the image of a distinctly white, war-time Englishness.

The Blitz narrative also worked well in introducing a dichotomy of good guys and bad. It was useful in so far as it enabled the government, and other authorities, to explain the bombers as people who belonged to the 'outside' of the community. This is of course one of the prevailing tricks of all nationalist narratives, to distinguish simply and unabashedly between 'us' and 'them'. Three of the bombers were second-generation British citizens who grew up on the outskirts of Leeds, England; the fourth was born in Jamaica but grew up in Huddersfield, England. They were all young, with varying degrees of further and higher education; they were mostly not from poor backgrounds (relatively at least); they were, according to the *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005*, of 'unexceptional background' (**authoring org for Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005**: 2006: 13). Nevertheless, in order to conform to a nationalist dichotomy, these young men needed to be portrayed as exceptional. The construction of the bombers as different, as un-British, and as radically 'other' would have taken some effort. But the decision to draw a sharp and absolute distinction between the bombers and British society more generally, was quickly and forcefully enacted by Prime Minister Blair in his statement following the bombings:

When they try to intimidate us, we will not be intimidated, when they seek to change our country, our way of life by these methods, we will not be changed. When they try to divide our people or weaken our resolve, we will not be terrorised (Blair 2005: n2).

The problem with a British 'call to arms' such as this one is that it is not automatically clear who counts as members of "our country" and who gets to decide what signifies 'our way of life'. Rarely is such language deployed without some people deciding to take it upon themselves to violently declare who is not properly 'British'. Muslim communities, or those *assumed* to be Muslim, now regularly experience the full force of these casual and sovereign judgements. On the 7 July 2005, the Islamic Human Rights Commission in the UK took the exceptional step of instructing Muslim people not to travel, or go out unless strictly necessary, for fear of reprisals (*The Independent* 8 July 2005).

In asserting the importance of British unity, Prime Minister Blair made a concerted effort to bring Muslims in to this 'British identity' and to disassociate 'extremists' from Muslims at large. The British government, and Blair in particular, have become unlikely spokespeople on the teachings of Islam, and regularly instruct us that the majority of Muslims abhor terrorism.<sup>7</sup> But in a double move, while 'bringing Muslims in', Blair's framing of terrorism also works to construct Muslims as another community - who are not quite British, and not quite terrorist either:

I welcome the statement put out by the Muslim Council who know that those people acted in the name of Islam but who also know that the vast and overwhelming majority of Muslims, here and abroad, are decent and law-abiding people who abhor this act of terrorism every bit as much as *we* do (Blair 2005: n2. Emphasis added).

This is a striking statement, and it is worth noting the timing of it. Released on the day of the bombings, it makes a very definite assumption that the perpetrators 'acted in the name of Islam' *before* the police and the intelligence authorities had been able to gather any facts (at least, if we believe the official government reports of what they knew, and when (Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy, MP (Chair), *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, (The Stationery Office, May 2006); *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005*, (The Stationery Office, May 2006); *Government Response to the Intelligence and Security Committee's Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, (The Stationery Office, May 2006). For a broader, more thorough and open analysis of what happened on 7 July 2005, see Richard Barnes MP (Chair), *Report of the 7 July Review Committee' to the London Assembly* (Greater London Authority, June 2006). But the most revealing thing about the statement is the way in which it skilfully distinguishes between Muslims who abhor terrorism and 'we' who also do. Muslims are therefore left hanging between an authentic British culture into which they are not fully invited, and a 'terrorist' community that Blair has constructed to differentiate the bombers from anything to do with British society. Muslims are 'decent and law-abiding people', Blair says. But he also firmly establishes that all 'Muslims' belong to a community that is not quite the same as 'ours'.

What we find is that Blair affirms three distinct communities: the British, the Muslims and the terrorists, and these three communities are disassociated from one another through their

organisation along a temporal scale. According to this progressive order, the 'British way of life' lies closest to the top, as that community that doesn't have to explain itself. The Muslim community, being British and yet not quite British, lies further down the scale, and will be called upon to demonstrate its enlightenment, and its allegiance to the 'British way of life', or else risk being branded as terrorist.<sup>8</sup> The terrorists are, crucially, off the scale: they are simply unable to acquire the kind of values that make us British and civilized, and will therefore never become enlightened. In an arresting move that carries with it great consequences, Blair shifts the burden of responsibility for the bombings from the terrorists, and from British society more generally, and places it squarely with the 'Muslim community'.

### **The Politics Of Origins**

Because appeals to a community of unity work by projecting from a 'lost' point of commonality, events such as the London bombings come to be seen as something that happened *to* the (British) community, which was settled and secure in its identity before these events came about to disturb it. This temporal framing needs to be challenged if we are in any way interested in exploring alternative responses to the bombings, and furthermore, different ideas of community. Rather than understand communities as always already constituted, we might instead adopt an idea of communities as constitutive, as created over and over again.<sup>9</sup> The motif of the city might be helpful in this respect, in suggesting the idea that communities are less something we inherit, and more of a politics.<sup>10</sup> The nationalist idea of communities as organisms, travelling steadily and linearly through history doesn't rest easily with the idea of the city. In the city, communities are fragile, improvised and shifting; their creation often involves violence, and communities often find themselves together having been forcefully shifted from another area of the city, or, from another country or region. Being in the city often means bearing witness to massive scale building works as well as significant devastation and ruin. It rarely involves stable and orderly development. Thus, cities represent key sites that illuminate the idea that violence isn't something that happens to resting communities, but rather, there is a constitutive relationship between community, power and violence.

Urban theorists argue that cities, warfare and organized political violence have always had a mutual relationship. As Stephen Graham has pointed out, cities continue to be key sites of conquest in war, and the symbol of national defeat or survival (Graham 2004: 1—25, 31—53). This might be demonstrated by the occupation of Baghdad in the most recent Iraq war, the fall of Kabul in November 2001, the attacks on New York's twin towers and the Pentagon in Washington, and the violence witnessed in recent years in Mumbai, Istanbul, Madrid, Casablanca, Delhi, Beirut, Grozny, Fallujah, and so on. Thus, just as cities require immense



effort, toil, labour, and energy to build, a similar effort is regularly deployed to take them apart. Therefore, writers who study the city are perhaps more inclined to understand communities through a different temporal prism. Rather than assume communities as sites of continuity, solidity, order and progress, communities in the city are perhaps better understood as constructed, fleeting, and moving. The unpredictable and contingent aspect of city life might be demonstrated in Marshall Berman's writings on the massive reconstruction of nineteenth century Paris and the aggressive 'modernisation' of New York, led by Baron Haussmann and Robert Moses respectively (*The Guardian* 8 July 2005). Both projects involved the forced expulsion of thousands of people, the displacement of entire communities, the wrecking of hundreds of buildings, the mass co-ordination of hundreds of workers, and the creation of some sublime but spectacular urban sculptures and landscapes. Berman shows us that urban life, and indeed modern life, involves a dialectical relationship of construction and destruction, brilliance and disaster. Following Berman and Graham, perhaps we shouldn't understand urban planning and urban destruction, as different phenomena in kind, but as part of a continuum, which connects urbanity, violence, and modernity:

All of which means that the division between urban planning geared towards urban growth and development, and that which focuses on attempts at place annihilation or attack, is not always clear. It is certainly much more fuzzy than urban planners - with their Enlightenment-tinged self-images of devoting themselves to instilling urban 'progress' and 'order' - might want to believe. In fact, it is necessary to assume that a continuum exists connecting acts of building and physical restructuring, on the one hand, and acts of all-out organized war and place annihilation on the other (Graham 2004: 33 n28).

How might this understanding of community, as foundationally intertwined with force and violence, alter our reading of London in the aftermath of the bombings, and our capacity to imagine communities more generally? Firstly, it suggests a different relationship between community and time. Rather than assume that the British community is a long-standing, bounded fixture that was 'attacked' in the bombings, we might instead trace the way that this British community was constructed through, and in response to the bombings. The language of British unity, and the dichotomies of civilized men and barbaric ones, good guys and bad were of course available - and dominant - before the bombings. But this narrative formed the governing framework through which responses to the bombings were formed. Secondly, it suggests that narratives that invoke a community of British unity involve their own forms of

violence. Commonality can only be produced through exclusion, after all, and in order to determine what 'we' are, it will be necessary to establish who is not the same. This might help us in enquiring into the power processes through which the idea of a community in unity is produced. Who does it claim to represent? And who does it exclude in its assertion of a common community?

### **London as a Multicultural Community**

The Blitz narrative was not the only account of commonality invoked in the aftermath of the bombings however; it was tied to the stipulation of contemporary London as a cosmopolitan city, recounted through the case of London winning the bid to host the Olympics in 2012. The International Olympic Committee announced that London had won the bid on the 6 July, a day before the bombings in London. Subsequently, the Olympics played a large part in the dominant narrative through which the 7 July bombings were explained. London's Olympics bid had been built on a platform selling the idea of London's diversity, and as a city of multiple communities. In the event of the bombings, it served as an ideal model to refer to in order to affirm the idea that London, and through it Britain, were tolerant communities, at ease with their multicultural, postnational selves. This is demonstrated in *The Guardian's* leading commentary on the day following the bombings:

Less than 24 hours before the bombs went off, London won a golden accolade from the rest of the world because it offered them an Olympic Games based on hope and inclusiveness towards all races, creeds and nations... London has won the Olympics because it is an open and tolerant city. The way Londoners responded to the vicious attacks on them has vindicated the Olympians' confidence (*The Guardian* 8 July 2005).

The narrative of the Olympics quickly dispersed as another example of Londoners at their best, and as the form of community that we should desire. There is nevertheless a difference in ethos between the Blitz narrative and the Olympics one. Whereas the Blitz conjures an image of British unity, the Olympics narrative was mainly deployed to affirm London - and through it Britain - as a multicultural, multiethnic community. Traditionally, under nationalism, difference represents a threat to the common identity of the community; the Blitz narrative conformed to this idea by suggesting an image of the British holding off the enemy 'outside'. In the Olympics narrative however, difference is celebrated as part of the community's postmodern identity. Yet although these two narratives present two seemingly very different agendas, they are more similar than we might at first glance suspect.<sup>11</sup>

Mayor Livingstone was widely seen as presenting a more progressive response to the bombings: leaders of civil liberties organisations and Muslim associations seemed to be more willing to speak alongside Ken Livingstone in order to try and contain the violence, than with the British government. This was demonstrated in a statement released by the Mayor and representatives from a range of community organisations and pressure groups following the bombings, and which was turned into a poster that was displayed across the London transport network. It claimed that, 'Only united communities will defeat terrorism and protect civil liberties'.<sup>12</sup> This message sought to provide a collective show of solidarity, across communities, faiths and organisations against the use of violence; but it also announced to the government that it would be ready to resist any suspension of civil liberties. Yet in order to deliver the statement, it effectively borrowed the statist-nationalist language of unity as the most important ordering principle. The theme of unity is persistent. Yet why must a united identity be a condition for organising to defend civil liberties? And what are the risks involved in reproducing this principle?

The Mayor's statement that, 'This was not a terrorist attack against the mighty and the powerful .... It was aimed at ordinary, working-class Londoners, black and white, Muslim and Christian, Hindu and Jew, young and old', worked well in bringing many different community leaders and pressure groups together (Livingstone **date?**). The full statement affirms London's status as a multicultural community. But as I have noted, this promotion of difference is curiously, and yet firmly supported by an insistence on unity. Thus while the Olympics narrative presents difference as something to be celebrated rather than feared, it is also accompanied by an appeal to a foundational unity:

That isn't an ideology, it isn't even a perverted faith - it is just an indiscriminate attempt at mass murder and we know what the objective is. *They seek to divide Londoners.* They seek to turn Londoners against each other. As I said to the International Olympic Committee, the city of London is the greatest in the world, because everybody lives side by side in harmony. Londoners will not be divided by this cowardly attack. They will stand together in solidarity alongside those who have been injured and those who have been bereaved and that is why I'm proud to be the mayor of this city (Livingstone **date?** Emphasis added).

Even while celebrating London's diversity, the greatest threat to the community is nevertheless understood to lie with 'division'. Wittingly or unwittingly therefore, this

statement seems to tie into a nationalist narrative that values unity above all else. Only in this case, difference appears as both something that can be valued *and* a threat.

It is important to understand that the two narratives of the Blitz and the Olympics were often deployed together. Thus in many of the British broadsheets, including *The Independent*, *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*, the affirmation of a specifically British war-time history is accompanied by the proud declaration that London is a multicultural city. It is significant that the Olympics narrative works in a very similar way to the Blitz narrative. It also focuses on a lost moment of harmony, which we must now, in the face of the bombings, seek to recover. We find a classic juxtaposition, organized according to a linear trajectory, between a time when we were deemed to be great and a time when we are now low: 'The contrast between triumph and sudden vulnerability could hardly be greater' (*The Telegraph* 8 July 2005). The longing to achieve greatness again abides by the classic formula through which the idea of a community in unity is produced. Only in this case, it is a community of diversity that is mourned, and appears as that which we must recoup. Winning the Olympics bid gains currency as another *foci imaginarii*, or as a 'high point' of multicultural solidarity from which we have now been plunged. In both the Blitz and the Olympic narratives however, it is the disorder of the present that we really cannot live with, and the idea that we are faced with differences that seem beyond our understanding. The multicultural narrative doesn't so much present an alternative to a triumphant account of British identity, as a variation on it. Sport, in particular, becomes the site around which a 'soft' and 'benign' form of nationalism is cast.

Of course, nationalist discourses of belonging are incredibly appealing; this is just one reason, quite apart from the massive institutional and financial support they receive, why they continue to circulate as the most dominant idiom through which we can imagine being together. But the idea of a community in unity also has its pernicious aspects: nationalism is Janus-faced. After all, our united identity is constructed in opposition to an 'other' that doesn't share it: in this case, the 'terrorists'. This is why the question of who decides who belongs to the community, and who doesn't, is a serious problem. This might be explored through another massive poster campaign what was launched by Transport for London in the later aftermath of the bombings, and in early 2007, continues to be displayed at a vast number of tube and bus stations. This campaign, aimed at boosting safety and security on London transport, urges that, 'It's up to all of us'. The press release that accompanied the launch explains what, exactly, is up to us in more detail:

The poster campaign, titled 'It's up to all of us', is supported by the Mayor of London, the British Transport Police (BTP), the Metropolitan Police Service (Met) and the City of London Police.

Jeroen Weimar, TfL's Director of Transport Policing and Enforcement, said:  
'The safety of our passengers and staff is our over-riding priority.

'We continue to invest in a range of measures to maintain the security of London's transport system, including the dedicated deployment of BTP and Transport Operational Command Unit officers undertaking visible patrols across London's Tubes, buses and DLR.

'One of the best security measures we have is the eyes of our customers. We are asking everybody to remain vigilant.

'Do look after your own luggage and belongings when travelling ...

...Don't be afraid to speak up...

...'If you spot something suspicious, don't be afraid to tell a member of staff or a police officer. It's up to all of us to keep London secure.' ...<sup>13</sup>

The theme of 'all of us' produced in this poster campaign provides further support to the idea that we are a united community. When this poster campaign was launched, it was often to be found placed next to a poster declaring '7 Million Londoners, 1 London', thereby multiplying the message of a community in unity. The shift to the word 'us' sets off warning bells for those who know well the capacity of nationalist language to stir violence. The bold black writing on the bright, warning-coloured red poster is contrasted by white writing that highlights the word 'all'. This emphasis on the word 'all' is interesting, for it seems to imply that part of the problem presented by terrorism is that not *everyone* is playing by the rules. In response, we *all* have to pull our weight to be on the lookout for those who threaten the community. And so we are effectively invited to police our fellow passengers. The problem is that we're not told what it is that we should be on the lookout *for*, apart from 'something suspicious'. Londoners, especially tube and bus travellers, had their reasons to be anxious in returning to their everyday journeys in the aftermath of the bombings. The many survivors caught up in the blasts, some more severely injured than others, had more reason still. But this poster introduces another reason why we might be anxious: we have all become suspicious of one another, even by city standards, in the wake of the bombings. The response offered to

such apprehension however, is not to build relations, or to keep prejudices in check, but ‘to speak up’ against our fellow passengers. Although we have nothing specific to be monitoring, we are nevertheless called upon to monitor. What is at stake in cultivating suspicion towards an ultimately mysterious object? Which communities and which peoples will mostly find themselves at the receiving end of this suspicion? How violent might some people’s attempts at community level policing become? This poster demonstrates that some people will be singled out as part of the process of establishing a single community.<sup>14</sup>

### **Community and the City**

In some ways, Ken Livingstone uses the opposite logic of Tony Blair to make his case for London as a community in unity. Tony Blair cleverly pushes the bombers out of British identity, by portraying them as representing everything that decidedly isn’t the ‘British way of life’. This incredibly smart, and yet utterly inaccurate formulation was delivered in a speech roughly eight months after the bombings, in which Blair commented on a video of what we are told to be Mohammad Sidique Khan, the deemed ringleader of the group’s pre-recorded statement of intent to cause terror:

There was something tragic, terrible but also ridiculous about such a diatribe. *He may have been born here. But his ideology wasn't.* And that is why it has to be taken on, everywhere (Blair 2006, emphasis added).

Leaving aside for now the potentially terrifying implications of the plan to ‘take’ these views ‘on’, ‘everywhere’, I want to note the way in which Blair distinguishes so absolutely between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In contrast, Ken Livingstone brings the whole world into the community:

London United: One City, One World (Livingstone 2005)

Everyone is welcome in Ken Livingstone’s world city. In contrast to the temporal construction of Britishness as enlightened and in no need of justification, Livingstone presents a spatial account of a community that can stretch out to include all differences. Yet, again, although Livingstone welcomes all faiths, ideologies, colours and creeds in his city, the terrorists must be portrayed as barbaric and fundamentally incapable of acquiring the values that Londoners represent:

That isn’t an ideology, it isn’t even a perverted faith - it is just an indiscriminate attempt at mass murder and we know what the objective is. They seek to divide Londoners.

This approach radically excludes the bombers from the community, in a similar way to Blair. In doing so, Livingstone presents us with similar problems: who decides on this limit between the community and the terrorists? Who decided which differences will not be included in the community of differences?

Uniquely, in his statement of response, Ken Livingstone chooses to address the bombers directly. While Blair addresses them in the third person plural, as ‘they’ who have tried to frighten ‘us’, projecting a sense of distance between him and the bombers, Livingstone chooses to ‘speak directly to those who came to London to take life’, and says to them:

[People] choose to come to London, as so many have come before because they come to be free, they come to live the life they choose, they come to be able to be themselves. They flee you because you tell them how they should live. They don’t want that and nothing you do, however many of us you kill, will stop that flight to our city where freedom is strong and where people can live in harmony with one another. Whatever you do, however many you kill, you will fail (Livingstone **date for ‘will not be divided?’**: n35).

This part of Livingstone’s speech represents an interesting fluctuation between nationalistic and cosmopolitan discourses. First of all, it is striking how Livingstone addresses the bombers as ‘you...who *came to London* to take life’ (Livingstone **date for ‘will not be divided?’**: n35, emphasis added). We may assume that Livingstone also didn’t know at this point that the bombers were British citizens. More significantly, he surely couldn’t have known that the bombers were *not* British, and not Londoners. Yet, here, he skilfully distinguishes between a community of Londoners and these people who came in to the city from ‘outside’. He firmly depicts them as foreigners to the city. This process of ‘othering’ seems similar to the one that Blair operated. What is significant, and indeed clever about it, is that it immediately constructs the bombers as people who are alien to British (and London’s) society. Although this idea might seem appealing when the horror of what happened seems beyond our capacity to understand the events in any meaningful way, it is nevertheless unhelpful. In upholding the idea that the perpetrators and their violent actions are radically ‘other’ to ‘our’ community, we disassociate ourselves from any responsibility towards understanding the wider social inequalities and unrests from which such rage may develop, and we excuse ourselves from any critical exploration of how these events may relate to London’s position as a global power and to British foreign policy more generally. Livingstone’s idea of a multicultural community seems to reproduce the language of nationalism.

Some aspects of the Mayor of London's campaigns go a long way to try and affirm a different, non-nationalistic understanding of community, however. This is exposed in the attempt to draw on the fabric of the city, as a site that is composed of radical difference. Nevertheless, a residual nationalism continues to haunt these campaigns, in that unity, as a rule, is still fundamentally necessary. How might the city present us with a different understanding of community to one that is based on unity? Homi Bhabha has suggested that the metropolis presents a radically different understanding of time and community to the one assumed by nationalism's 'homogenous, empty-time', in which we are all imagined to be travelling together, through history (Bhabha 2004: 199--244). Bhabha claims that the city, in its radical cosmopolitanism, disturbs the narrative of national, linear time, by presenting the 'return of the postcolonial migrant to alienate the holism of history' (Bhabha 2004: 241). Whereas British narratives of solidity and continuity might portray London as the capital of a British organism's development in time, Bhabha suggests that the city disturbs that narrative, by exposing the way in which London, and Britishness, have both been constructed through global power games. The figure of the postcolonial migrant in the city reminds us of those multiple, trans-national histories. As Paul Gilroy deftly puts it: 'The immigrant is now here because Britain, Europe, was once out there' (Gilroy 2004: 110 n17).

However, Livingstone's presentation of London as a multicultural city doesn't present a rupture of the national narrative. The community of '7 million Londoners, 1 London' is decidedly flat, and omits mentioning that the presence of so many different people in the city might be somehow linked to Britain and London's role as a colonial and imperial power. This doesn't help us appreciate how 'others' in the city are here *because* of British history, and that they cannot be understood in a separate relationship to it. It also doesn't help us understand how differences get treated differently.<sup>15</sup> However progressive we might find Livingstone's approach to be, it chooses to ignore the critique of British nationalism that could lie with the idea of a cosmopolitan society, and specifically, in the figure of the migrant in the city. This symbolic figure stands as a historical witness to British colonial and imperial history and to the pernicious effects of nationalist ambitions to secure historical legacies:

Cultural pluralism recognizes difference so long as the general category of the people is still fundamentally understood within a national frame. Such benevolence is well intentioned, but it fails to acknowledge the critique of modernity that minoritarian cosmopolitans embody in their historic witness to the twentieth century (Breckenridge *et al* 2002: 6).



Yet in balance to the nationalist spin, Livingstone does seem to touch upon a tradition of urban thought in which he understands the city as presenting a significantly alternative understanding of community. In his statement, the city represents a space to possibly escape determinist or fundamentalist ideas about identity and community. It is a place where people 'come to be free', to 'come to live the life they choose', to 'come to be able to be themselves'. Of course, this description, and the idea that *Stadt luft macht frei* is overly romantic. People often come to the city because they are fleeing for their lives, or struggling to avoid absolute poverty. The city presents its own risks of violence. As Thrift and Amin suggest, the city is as much a means of shutting down possibility, as it is a means of opening up some alternative encounters (Thrift and Amin 2004: 105). There is no 'escape' from determinations, from the force of the law, or from a capitalist and statist system. Yet, nevertheless, Livingstone touches upon an important cultural tradition that is as inherent to the experience of modernity as is the yearning for a lost community of unity. For a flood of figures in music, art, film and writing have sought to respond to the contingency, the chaos, the risks, and the volatile experience of everyday life under modern conditions by refusing to rely on nostalgia, or to live according to a *foci imaginarii* in which we can all look forward to a day when differences will be phased out and a stable order will be restored. This tradition might be represented by figures as diverse as John Cage, Rohinton Mistry, Orhan Pamuk, Susan Sontag, Luce Irigaray and Jacques Derrida. This is the idea of a city that those most fond of a community in unity have often struggled against. Fran Tonkiss expands on this contrast:

The life of community is the vanishing counterpoint to urban life, and the longing for community carries an implied critique of the city. As a social form that is always receding from view, continually at a point of crisis, community might be seen as much as the stuff of political fantasy or sociological romance as a matter of social actuality (Tonkiss 2005: 9).

This is not to say that there is no community in the city. Rather, the city offers us a symbol through which we might imagine a different way of understanding community. If this longing for commonality is largely a fantasy, and city life displays the very impossibility of it to an extreme, how then might the city landscape offer us an alternative way of conceiving what it might mean to be and to live in common?

Drawing from urban theory and writings on the city, Tonkiss makes the point that many people don't come to the city to celebrate their difference; rather, people also come to the city to be indifferent. She remarks on the tradition of urban writing represented by figures such as

Georg Simmel, who have explored the paradoxical quality of anonymity in the city. While the idea of walking in the crowd, of being surrounded by a thousand faces and not knowing any of them, of touching and pushing past people in the busy street or metro carriage while carefully refraining from getting too close, represents an art of city life that some might understand as alienation, loneliness and a *lack* of community; for others, this is the culture that has enabled them to be indifferent, to be private, to walk and travel ‘unhindered, unremarked and unbothered’ (Tonkiss 2005: 9--10). Various feminists have associated this experience with being in the city. It might also apply to spaces sought out in the city by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered peoples. It might be seen in the underground spaces and the squats rooted out by musicians and artists. It could be seen in the figure of the young migrant - in London to earn a better living and enjoy the life of the city.

Jean Charles de Menezes is a figure that reminds us that escape and being indifferent is never, however, guaranteed. Jean Charles was a Brazilian working in London as an electrician, and was shot eight times at close range on the 22 July by British anti-terrorist officers in a case of mistaken identity. Although the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair initially announced that the decision to shoot was ‘directly linked’ to their search for those who allegedly attempted and failed to detonate four bombs across the transport network on 21 July, it quickly emerged that he had no connection to the events at all.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps this young man experienced the full terrifying stakes of what is legitimized to protect the British community and London from ‘division’. What happens if we persist with Homi Bhabha’s approach, refusing to understand the figure of the migrant in the city as that which temporarily disrupts a pre-constituted community, and rather, think of him as he who illuminates, for a moment, the terror that is the condition of constituting the community? How does this sort of terror compare to that which was unleashed by the bombers? Or as Jacques Derrida asked in relation to the tragic loss of life in Washington, New York and Pennsylvania on the 11 September, 2001: ‘How does a terror that is organized, provoked, and instrumentalized differ from that fear that an entire tradition, from Hobbes to Schmitt and even to Benjamin, holds to be the very conditions of the authority of law and of the sovereign exercise of power, the very condition of the political and the state?’ (Derrida 2003: 102)

The deeper implications of this study of political responses to the London bombings for political and international relations theory is that the idea of a community in unity continues to provide the overwhelmingly dominant framework for imagining what it might mean to be in common, or to form political coalitions. But why is unity necessary for effective political action? I have explored how particular accounts of community work in relation to a story of original unity and a narrative of linear time, and how that trope is often reproduced when we

examine claims to alternative notions of community more closely. I have sought to reveal the violence involved in claims to origins and how they work to reify a dichotomous understanding of the possibilities for identities and differences. I have also suggested that the task of avoiding this reification of a community in unity might lie with exploring a different idea of origins, as something other than a shared essence, and with it different ideas of time that might prompt other forms of imagining communities. At its core, this task will involve disputing the experience of modernity as one of yearning for a snatched unity. I have suggested that this aspiration might be pursued in the motif of the city. But, as I have argued, the city might equally lead us to the familiar impasses involved in an insistence upon unity. The question of how we pursue the possibility of community without reproducing oppression remains a challenge.

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***Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005, (London: The Stationery Office, May 2006), p. 13.***

***Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy, MP (Chair), Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005, (The Stationery Office, May 2006); Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005, (The Stationery Office, May 2006); Government Response to the Intelligence and Security Committee’s Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005, (The Stationery Office, May 2006). For***

**a broader, more thorough and open analysis of what happened on 7 July 2005, see Richard Barnes MP (Chair), *Report of the 7 July Review Committee' to the London Assembly* (Greater London Authority, June 2006).**

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the idea of a community in unity, see Corlett, W. (1989), *Community without Unity: a politics of Derridean extravagance*, Durham [N.C.] and London: Duke University Press, and the opening chapters of Nancy, J. (1991), *The Inoperative Community*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Edited by Peter Connor; Foreword by Christopher Fynsk.



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<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I refer to the following poster campaigns: ‘7 Million Londoners, 1 London’ sponsored by London advertising and media organisations (launched by the Mayor’s Office 1/8/2005); replaced in Autumn 2006 by ‘We are Londoners, We are One’, funded by British Gas and Capital Radio (<http://www.london.gov.uk/onelondon/>, accessed 26/4/2006 and 6/12/2006); a joint statement, and poster, released by the Mayor and representatives from a range of community organisations and pressure groups, claiming that ‘Only united communities will defeat terrorism and protect civil liberties’ (launched 26/8/2005, [http://www.london.gov.uk/view\\_press\\_release.jsp?releaseid=5795](http://www.london.gov.uk/view_press_release.jsp?releaseid=5795), accessed 26/4/2006); and a poster aimed at boosting safety and security on London transport, titled, ‘It’s up to all of us’, launched by Transport for London and supported by the Mayor of London, the British Transport Police (BTP), the Metropolitan Police Service (Met) and the City of London Police (launched 28/11/2005, <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/press-centre/press-releases/press-releases-content.asp?prID=603>, visited 26/4/2005). At the time of writing, in early 2007, ‘Its up to all of us’ posters continue to be displayed across the London Underground.

<sup>3</sup> John Tulloch’s book *One Day in July. Experiencing 7/7* (London: Little, Brown, 2006) offers both a fascinating personal account of 7 July 2005 and the months following, and an excellent critical analysis of the media coverage of the events. Tulloch points to Ken Livingstone as someone who offered an alternative response to the Blair line, p. 196.

<sup>4</sup> For more on how nationalism involves a relationship toward the Nation qua Thing, see Žižek, S. (1993), *Tarrying with the Negative. Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, Durham: Duke University Press: 200--37.

<sup>5</sup> For more on how nationalism and cosmopolitanism developed together in the history of ideas, see Cheah, P. (1998), ‘Introduction Part II: The Cosmopolitical Today’, in P. Cheah and B. Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitics. Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press: 20--44.

<sup>6</sup> ‘What the papers say’, *The Guardian*, Friday 8 July 2005. The first quote is from the British tabloid paper, *The Sun*; the second is from the *Daily Mirror*.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the radical dispersion and globalisation of authorities on Islam, see Devji, F. (2005), *Landscapes of the Jihad. Militancy. Morality. Modernity*, London: Hurst & Company.

<sup>8</sup> For a brilliant analysis of the way in which the burden of responsibility was laid with Muslim communities in the Werenotafraid.com internet campaign, following the London bombings, see Weber,

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C. (2006), 'An Aesthetics of Fear: The 7/7 London Bombings, the Sublime, and Werenotafraid.com'. *Millennium. Journal of International Studies* 34(3): 683--712.

<sup>9</sup> For more on constitutive ideas of identity and community, formed around the notion of performativity in particular, see Butler, J. (1999), *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York and London: Routledge.

<sup>10</sup> I borrow this phrasing from Clifford, J. (1997), *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press: 46.

<sup>11</sup> For more on how the national and the post-national accounts of community work according to the same principle whereby difference is seen as a threat, see Honig, B. (2001), *Democracy and the Foreigner*, Princeton N.J. and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Initial signatories included the Mayor of London Ken Livingstone; Director of Liberty, Shami Chakrabarti; Sir Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain; the Muslim Association of Britain; politicians from the Labour, LibDem, Green and Scottish National parties; writers and journalists; the General Secretaries of four national trade unions; representatives of a range of community organisations and faith groups; civil liberties lawyers and student leaders, note 4.

<sup>13</sup> A similar message is repeated by Chief Superintendent Paul Crowther, of British Transport Police and Mike Bowron, Assistant Commissioner of City of London Police in the full press statement, note 4.

<sup>14</sup> This responsibility placed upon 'all of us' coincided with an intensification in 'stop and search' police operations, which had been reduced following criticism in the UK context for the way in which the policy grossly discriminated against young Black men.

<sup>15</sup> For more on how certain differences are treated differently see, Crosby, C. (1992), 'Dealing with Differences' in J. Butler and J. W. Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorize the Political*, New York and London: Routledge: 130--43.

<sup>16</sup> For more see Nick Vaughan-Williams's chapter in this volume.